

Docket Item #28  
BAR CASE #2005-0273

BAR Meeting  
December 7, 2005

**ISSUE:** Demolition and capsulation

**APPLICANT:** City of Alexandria Community Services Board by L. Michael Gilmore

**LOCATION:** 115 North Patrick

**ZONE:** CD/Commercial

---

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

NOTE: This docket item requires a roll call vote.

**I. ISSUE:**

Currently vacant, the former clubhouse operated by the City's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation & Substance Abuse is being converted to a multi-family residential building. To facilitate this adaptive re-use, the applicant is requesting approval of a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate. The major alteration is removal of a section of the roof structure for the sunken roof promenade. A connecting corridor will be constructed to link the main and secondary buildings on the second level. Other alterations involve minor changes to infill or create window and door openings. The proposed demolition and capsulation is described in more detail below:



Roof of main building

- remove section of roof at the middle of the building measuring 28' x 30' for the construction of a sunken roof promenade
- remove section of roof 21' back from the front building wall and measuring 10' x 10' for a the construction of enclosed stairway to access roof

Front (west) elevation of main building

- demolish existing (1980) handicapped ramp
- extend front door opening to ground level

North elevation of main building

- extend two existing window openings for longer window openings at back of first story
- create new window opening in place of existing small masonry opening at back of first story

North elevation of existing first level connecting link

- infill two existing openings
- reduce existing door opening for new window opening

North elevation of secondary building

- infill existing window opening on first story
- reopen original door opening on second story by removing wood panels

East (rear) elevation of main building

- infill existing window opening
- capsulate an area of wall measuring 6' x 8'

East (rear) elevation of secondary building

- infill existing window opening in first story on south side
- create new window opening in first story on north side

West (front) elevation of secondary building

- capulate an area of wall measuring 6' x 8'

South elevation of main building

- infill existing window openings in first story near front of building
- create two new door openings in the first story near front of building in place of existing window openings
- infill two existing window openings between the first and second stories near the rear of the building

The complex is visible from Patrick Street and from the public alley on the north side of the building. The rear is partially visible in a through-block view down the alley. Views of the first story of the main building at the rear and the south side from the public right of way are limited.

## **II. HISTORY:**

The two story, brick building at 115 North Patrick Street was constructed between 1896 and 1902 as Engine House No. 3. The large rectangular building occupied most of the lot. However, a one story wood shed was located at the rear in the northeast corner and a “drying pan” in the southeast corner. By 1907, the Engine House designation is changed from No. 3 to No. 5. Sanborn maps indicate no physical changes to the property until 1921 when the one story wood shed is shown as a two story brick storage building and a small addition for a water closet links the firehouse to the storage building.

By the mid-1940s, the engine house was no longer required for its original use. The rapid growth of the city ensured that the property would be re-used. In 1946, the City Manager appointed Milton Grigg as the architect for the remodeling of the building as the new home of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court for the city. The City Manager’s action was controversial for several reasons. The Chief Judge of the Court did not favor the location, lawyers practicing before the Court felt it was too far away from the other courts housed in City Hall, and the city rescue squad felt that the firehouse should be given to them when it became available after the fire company moved to a new building on Cameron Street. The matter came to a head at the end of the month when a motion was introduced at City Council to abandon the project. In Grigg’s presentation to Council he stressed the cost saving associated with this adaptive reuse project. The motion to eliminate the project failed on a vote of 4-3, but a subsequent motion required that Grigg’s plans be submitted to City Council for final approval. With this narrow endorsement Grigg commenced work on preparing a design.

Grigg’s final design showed a firehouse transformed into a Georgian Revival courthouse with a central pedimented doorway with quoin surrounds, a pair of flanking multi-light windows with a segmental jack arch with keystone on the first floor and large two story arched windows with keystones on the second level. Grigg’s design mirrors closely that of the former Federal Post Office building built in 1930 at the corner of South Washington and Prince Streets with a central pedimented quoined limestone entryway and arched windows with keystones. Bids were opened

in December 1946 and the work was completed by October of 1947.

Despite a subsequent change in use to a Community Mental Health Center, the exterior appearance of the facility is largely unchanged from the Grigg renovation. In 1980, a handicapped ramp was approved for the front elevation (Building Permit #36379, 7/2/1980). In 1987, alterations and additions at the rear of the main building permitted the former storage building in the northeast corner of the lot to be used as an office (Building Permit #1252, 12/7/1987). These plans were approved by the Board of Architectural Review on May 20, 1987 (Bar Case #87-88).

Milton Latour Grigg (1905-1982) was one several of the original architects for the restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia who subsequently worked in Alexandria. Of these, Grigg did the most work in the city. An Alexandria native, he received his architectural degree from the University of Virginia in 1929 and almost immediately began work at Williamsburg. When the architectural staff was disbanded in 1933, he established his own architectural firm where he continued to practice until his retirement in 1980. Grigg and his firm were prolific and efficient architects and the work ranged widely. He did a great deal of historic preservation and restoration work that drew heavily on his experiences at the Williamsburg restoration. Among Grigg's best known Alexandria projects are the restoration of the Ramsay House and the Parish Halls for both Christ Church on North Washington Street (1950) and St. Paul's Episcopal Church on South Pitt Street (1947).

On October 5, 2005, the Board denied the approval of a Permit to Demolish and a Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to this property (BAR Case #2005-0193 & 0194). The Board denied the project on the basis of the roof deck. This new application differs from the previous in that it involves the construction of a roof promenade sunken within the roof of the main building. The promenade replaces the roof deck that was proposed for the top of the one story connecting link located toward the rear of the complex. While the sunken roof promenade will entail the demolition of a portion of the roof structure of the main building, the extent of demolition and capsulation to occur at the rear of main building, one story connecting link and secondary building has been reduced from the prior proposal.

### **III. ANALYSIS:**

In considering a Permit to Demolish/Capsulate, the Board must consider the following criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance, §10-105(B):

- (1) Is the building or structure of such architectural or historical interest that its moving, removing, capsulating or razing would be to the detriment of the public interest?
- (2) Is the building or structure of such interest that it could be made into a historic house?
- (3) Is the building or structure of such old and unusual or uncommon design, texture and material that it could not be reproduced or be reproduced only with great difficulty?
- (4) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve the memorial character of the George Washington Memorial Parkway?
- (5) Would retention of the building or structure help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the city?
- (6) Would retention of the building or structure promote the general welfare by

maintaining and increasing real estate values, generating business, creating new positions, attracting tourists, students, writers, historians, artists and artisans, attracting new residents, encouraging study and interest in American history, stimulating interest and study in architecture and design, educating citizens in American culture and heritage, and making the city a more attractive and desirable place in which to live?

In the opinion of the staff, none of the above criteria are met. The nearly all of the proposed alterations are relatively minor. Most of the capsulation and demolition is confined to secondary elevations. The only alterations proposed for the front elevation are the removal of the modern handicapped ramp and the extension of the door opening to grade. It is assumed that the extension of the original opening by less than a foot is required to facilitate access and allows for the removal of the non-original ramp. The capsulation at the second story of the rear of the main building and front of the secondary building for the connector is confined to only that area necessary to achieve the connection. A number of the proposed alterations to infill, enlarge or reduce existing openings will be made to non-original openings. Staff believes alterations to original openings have been kept to a minimum. The demolition of a section of the roof structure of the building is of some concern. However, the roof framing is not something that is or ever was intended to be visible to the public. The relatively recent (circa 1900) date of construction ensures that the roof framing will hold little value in terms of unusual construction techniques or craftsmanship.

**IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Therefore, Staff recommends approval of the application as submitted.

## CITY DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

Legend: C - code requirement R - recommendation S - suggestion F- finding

### Code Enforcement:

C-1 Prior to the issuance of a demolition permit or land disturbance permit, a rodent abatement plan shall be submitted to Code Enforcement that will outline the steps that will taken to prevent the spread of rodents from the construction site to the surrounding community and sewers.

### Historic Alexandria:

“No comment.”